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## ECCLESIASTICUS: THE RETRANSLATION HYPOTHESIS.

THE close resemblance of the names Ecclesiasticus and Ecclesiastes might suggest, on a superficial view, that there is an equally close internal relation between the two books. Such a relation does not, however, exist. It has been justly remarked that the affinity of Ecclesiasticus is with the Book of Proverbs rather than with Ecclesiastes. This affinity or relation is of considerable importance with regard to a fact strongly insisted on with respect to the alleged dual origin of the newly found text of Ecclesiasticus. That there are in this text doublets or verses more or less identical in language or in meaning cannot be denied. But this phenomenon presents itself in sufficient abundance in the Book of Proverbs. One proverb even occurs in precisely the same form in two places of the same section of the Book, xiv. 12; xvi. 25:—

יש דרך ישר לפני איש  
ואחריתה דרכי מות

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man;  
But the end thereof are the ways of death.”

Approximating to this absolute identity, instances may be cited of proverbs nearly alike in both form and meaning. Here are two, with regard to which it is noteworthy that they occur near together in the same chapter. Thus, at xix. 5, we have—

עד שקרים לא ינקה  
ויפיה כזבים לא ימלט

Then the ninth verse gives us the same words, with the exception that **יאבד** is substituted for **לא ימלט**. If we were disposed to give the reins to our imagination, we might argue that the substitution was made under Syriac influence, as the reader may see, by consulting the lexicon under **صح** and **لج**. In the English version the fifth verse is translated,—

“A false witness shall not be unpunished,  
And he [that] speaketh lies shall not escape.”

The ninth verse substitutes "shall perish" for "shall not escape." If the reader desires other examples, he may compare xi. 21 with xvi. 5; xix. 25 with xxi. 11; xx. 10 with xx. 23; xxi. 9 with xxi. 19; xix. 12 with xx. 2. These last examples are antithetic, and so are xi. 25, 26, verses apparently placed close together on account of the antithesis; and the editor may have been influenced also by the word **בִּרְכָּה**. The precise causes influencing the arrangement of the proverbs in many cases it is difficult or impossible to determine. Proverbs of similar or identical meaning may be placed near together, as the examples cited show. And there would appear to be no reason why such proverbs should not be arranged consecutively, if the collectors had been so disposed. And it should not be forgotten that Ecclesiasticus is, like the Proverbs, a collection. At xxxiii. 16 the author describes himself as "one that gathereth after the grape-gatherers," but, he continues, "by the blessing of the Lord I profited, and filled my wine-press like a gatherer of grapes." If he met with proverbs in an Aramaic dress, there would be nothing to prevent his incorporating such proverbs in his collection, at the same time retaining more or less of the original diction; and he might, for the sake of comparison, purposely place such proverbs in close juxtaposition with others of similar import<sup>1</sup>.

The British Museum fragments, which were edited and annotated by the Rev. G. Margoliouth for the October number of this REVIEW, contain interesting and illustrative examples of doublets. Passing over the curious example of the evil eye, xxxi. 15, on which the editor himself comments, we come to verses 15 and 18, where the editor translates,—

"Know thy neighbour like thyself,  
And carefully consider all that thou hatest.  
Take thy seat like a man who is chosen,  
And do not rush <sup>2</sup>lest thou be disliked <sup>2</sup>.  
Know that thy neighbour is like thyself,  
And eat like a man that which he has placed before thee."

<sup>1</sup> It is due to Mr. I. Abrahams to mention that he called attention to the doublets in the Book of Proverbs in *J. Q. R.*, October, 1899, p. 176, and even said of Ben Sira that "he must have perceived these doublets, and as I venture to think may have proceeded to imitate them."

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a better rendering would be "do not clear the board," following the Sept. *μη διαμασῶ*, "do not gobble up." The Greek translator seems to have regarded **חָטַח** as derived from a verb **חָטַח**, with the sense of the Syriac. "Disliked" appears scarcely strong enough as a rendering of **הִנֵּל**. The use of such a verb as **נָל** agrees with the interpretation of **אֵל חָטַח**, which I have suggested.

Here between the two elements of the doublet a verse, or at least two lines, are interposed. A very little further (vers. 18 and 27) we have another example of the doublet with a still longer portion of the text interposed between the two occurrences. As in several places of the Book of Proverbs, the first member of the verse is exactly the same in both cases, but the second member differs greatly. Mr. Margoliouth translates,—

- (1) "Surely a little is sufficient for a man of understanding,  
And he does not burn on his bed. Pain," &c.
- (2) "Surely a little is sufficient for a man of understanding,  
And even if thou hast been constrained with dainties, keep  
on hoping, and thou shalt have ease."

It would be, I am afraid, a hopeless task to attempt to prove that the one is derived from the Greek, and the other from the Syriac, either as it now stands, or as it may be supposed to have stood originally. The probability would seem to be that there is a designed repetition for the sake of what is to follow.

Immediately following the last quotation we have an example of the doublet which agrees very well with Mr. Margoliouth's theory of two or more recensions, the one member being taken from one, and the other, in close juxtaposition, from another :—

"Hear, my son, and despise me not,  
And in the end thou shalt lay hold on my words.  
Hear, my son, and accept my instruction,  
And laugh not at me ;  
And in the end thou shalt find my words."

Again the theory of duplex derivation could scarcely lead to success, even though, in the opinion of Mr. Margoliouth, the first member agrees more with the Greek, and the second with the Syriac.

Then we have two proverbs which we may regard as originally distinct, but placed together on account of their similarity to a certain extent. I still follow Mr. Margoliouth's translation :—

"The furnace proveth the work of the artificer,  
So is the wine with regard to the quarrelling of the scornful.  
A man of understanding proveth every work,  
So is strong drink with regard to the strife of the scornful."

The difference here is so considerable as to make the reader hesitate with regard to the one proverb being derived from one recension and

the other from another. The recension theory may suit better the following,—

“What life is there to him who is without wine?” &c.

and,

“What life is there to him who is without new wine?” &c.

But the difference may be ascribed to a divergent development of the proverbs previous to the composition of Ben Sira's book. Again, moreover, the derivation from Greek and Syriac would be at fault.

In the *Revue des Études Juives*, M. Lévi adduces several examples of the doublet with the view of showing that one member is derived from the Greek and the other from the Syriac. Most of these examples he allows the reader to investigate for himself *à son gré*; but two of them he discusses more particularly, namely, xxx. 17 and xxx. 20. The first of these may be translated,—

“To die is better than a life of vanity,  
And eternal rest than continual pain.  
To die is better than an evil life,  
And to go down to Sheol than enduring pain.”

The first member can scarcely be said to be a translation of the Greek *κρείσσων θάνατος ὑπὲρ ζωῆς πικρὰν ἢ ἀρρώσθημα ἔμμουον*. The second member agrees sufficiently well with the Syriac; but it might, according to Mr. Margoliouth's view, be derived from a different recension, or the original collector may have placed together two proverbs varying somewhat in expression. The other example may be regarded as at once more difficult and more interesting:—

כֹּאשֶׁר סִירִים (סִרִּים) יִחְבֵּק נַעֲרָה וּמִתְאַנֵּחַ  
בֶּן עֵשָׂה בְּאֵנָם מִשְׁפָּט  
בֶּן נֶאֱמָן לֵן עִם בְּתוּלָה  
וְיִי מִבְקֵשׁ מִיָּדוֹ

Dr. Taylor translates,—

“As an eunuch (?) embraceth a maiden and groaneth,  
So is he that doeth judgment with violence (?).  
As an eunuch (?) that lieth with a virgin,  
And the Lord requireth it at his hand.”

It is noticeable that in the Hebrew the two couplets have a quite different sense. The first (with the pretty certain emendation סִרִּים) speaks of a eunuch fruitlessly embracing a maiden. The second, where נֶאֱמָן may well have been translated in the Syriac מְהִימָנָא, with the sense, “one who is faithful or trusted” lying during the night

with a virgin, and presumably, by the intercourse violating his trust. Otherwise it is not easy to see how "the Lord requireth it at his hand," which agrees with the Syriac, could follow. There is not that equivalence of meaning in the two members of the doublet which the retranslation hypothesis requires.

Professor D. S. Margoliouth, of Oxford, also refers in the *Guardian* for November 8 to two alleged doublets. He says, "In xxx. 12 b the Greek and Syriac texts both bid a father 'thump' his son's back. But the Greek word for 'thump' might be rendered 'crush,' and so we have one Hebrew verse bidding the father 'crush' his son's back; and the Syriac word for 'thump' might be rendered 'split,' and so we have another Hebrew verse in which the father is bidden to 'split' his son's back. Now if the Hebrew advised the parent *either* to 'crush' *or* to 'split' his son's back, we should be told that this was excellent advice; but it requires more than ordinary hardihood to maintain that Ben Sira advised a father to do both. Should he split it first and crush it afterwards?"

Without assenting to this philological disquisition, I may say that Professor Margoliouth appears to disregard the fact, alluded to above, that Ecclesiasticus is a collection of proverbs. Proverbs expressed in language savouring somewhat of hyperbole may have been placed together without at all implying that they are to be carried into practice consecutively. And it should be observed that the correction or punishment of youth is a matter repeatedly and strongly expressed in the canonical Book of Proverbs. I need only refer, without quoting, to xiii. 24; xix. 18; xxii. 15; xxiii. 13; xxix. 17.

The other passage which Professor Margoliouth adduces is xxxi. 4, with reference to which he says, "The Greek and the Syriac tell us that the poor man labours in deficiency of life (i. e. livelihood)." But the Syriac word for "life" also means "house." And the Greek word for life (*βίον*) is very like a word meaning "strength" (*βίαις*). Hence we have two alternative renderings in the Hebrew, one with "house," and another with "strength." It may make the matter clearer to give the Hebrew:—

יגע עני לחסר ביתו  
ואם ינוח יהיה צריך  
עמל עני לחסר כחו  
ואם ינוח לא נחת לו

"The poor laboureth on account of the penury of his household,  
And if he rests, he becomes needy.  
The poor toileth on account of the lack of his strength (means,  
Taylor),  
And if he rests, he is without (real) rest."

Though בית pretty clearly means "his household," little difficulty need be felt about the Syriac translator rendering בית by ܒܝܬܐ. But there is a good deal of difficulty about Professor Margoliouth's suggestion that his supposed translator from Greek into Hebrew read βίον as βίας: βία occurs only once in the Greek Ecclesiasticus, xx. 4, and there the meaning is "violence," a sense which can scarcely be suitable here. The word for strength in Ecclesiasticus is ἰσχός, and this word is found in sufficient abundance. A very good and illustrative example is to be seen in xxxi. 30, ἐλαττών ἰσχύν (Heb. מחסר כח).

From the acrostic or partial acrostic in chap. li, I do not see that any valid argument in favour of the retranslation hypothesis can be drawn.

We may now proceed to the consideration of some positive evidence in favour of the genuineness of the newly found Hebrew. But this evidence need not blind us to the fact that this Hebrew, even so far as it goes, is both imperfect and corrupt.

There are in the Cambridge text two places to which I desire to call especial attention as giving pretty conclusive evidence. And there are probably other passages, the testimony of which would be just as valid, though they may not yet have been detected. Of those which I now adduce, the first is xiii. 26. Dr. Charles Taylor translates the verse thus:—

"A token of a merry heart is a bright countenance; and study and meditation is wearisome thought."

To the verse thus translated a note of interrogation is added, to show that the translator regarded the rendering, at least of the last member of the verse, as more or less doubtful. The last part of the verse I should prefer to render, "But the close study of problems is toilsome" (ושיג ושיח מחשבת עמל). As Dr. Taylor indicates, שיג ושיח ("retirement and meditation," or "close study") is in all probability derived from 1 Kings xviii. 27, where we have כי שיח וכי שיג לו, referring to Baal in Elijah's ironical address. The plural מחשבת is used in Ex. xxxi. 4, xxxv. 35, of skilfully devised works, or, rather of the plans or designs for such work. From this sense the transition is tolerably easy to difficult and involved subjects of thought, or, briefly, "problems." The Greek is in general accordance with this view, καὶ εὗρεσις παραβολῶν διαλογισμοὶ μετὰ κόπον, "and the finding out of parables [requires] laborious reasonings." While it is easy to see in the Greek a reflection of the Hebrew, it is difficult or impossible to imagine that, in a retranslation from the Greek, שיג ושיח would have been borrowed from the passage in Kings, and it is still less credible, perhaps, that παραβολῶν should have been rendered by such

a word as **מחשבת** instead of the usual **משלים**. From the Syriac, "And an abundance of stories are the thoughts of sinners," the Hebrew could not possibly have been derived. But, with the newly found text before us, it is easy to detect the Hebrew through every word of the Syriac. This juxtaposition may make the matter somewhat clearer:—

שִׁינ שִׁיח מַחֲשַׁבַת עֵמֶל  
סוֹנָאָא שׁוּעִיתָא תְּרַעִיתָא חֲטִיָּא

The incoherency of the Syriac rendering, caused no doubt by the translator failing to understand his text, affords a strong argument for the genuineness of the Hebrew. The misunderstanding of **שִׁינ** scarcely needs comment, unless it be to say that even the misunderstanding affords strong evidence that the Syriac translator had the Hebrew text before him. As to **עֵמֶל**, with moral significance, Isa. x. 1 and other passages may be compared.

The other place to which I refer is xiv. 11, where Dr. Taylor translates,—

"My son, if thou hast wherewithal, minister to thine own self;  
And if thou hast, do good unto thyself;  
And according to the power of thy hand make thyself fat."

The conclusion of this verse which may be given as, "And if you are able to do so, make yourself fat (**הִרְשֵׁן**)," is certainly a singular piece of advice to be found in a quasi-Biblical book. The Greek diverges remarkably, "My son, according to thy ability, do good to thyself, and present worthy offerings to the Lord (*καὶ προσφέρὰς Κυρίῳ ἀξίως πρόσχαρε*)." The newly discovered Hebrew affords a reasonable explanation. The Greek translator, repelled by so coarse a piece of advice as "grow fat," changed this into a religious admonition, "Make fat (and therefore worthy) offerings to the Lord." The Syriac translator may have cut the knot by omitting the clause altogether. It appears sufficiently evident that the Hebrew could not possibly be a retranslation from the Greek and Syriac, either separately or conjointly. With regard to the Greek, Edersheim speaks of it as "an attempted combination of enjoyment with piety"; and this can scarcely be regarded as harmonious with the context. As to the Greek translator modifying a coarse expression, xxxi. 20 may be compared, where we have **קִרְב צוֹלֵל**, which Mr. G. Margoliouth translates "a purged belly"; and with regard to the Greek he observes, "**צוֹלֵל** (purged) is toned down into *μετρίῳ* (moderate)." It is possible that other examples are to be found in connexion with ver. 19 (**שִׁיִּק**, see Margoliouth's foot-note), and **קוֹה קוֹה** of ver. 21. Mr. Margoliouth seems to think, and he is probably right, that the meaning really is



"vomit, vomit," though this sense, as he says, is not given by "the usual Greek and the Syriac." In the curious verse xxxvi. 18 there may be another example, what is said of eating, as in Prov. ix. 17, having reference to *res venerae*.

In the *Guardian* for February 17, 1897, I called attention to the remarkable resemblance between certain expressions in Eccles. xii. 12, 13, and the Hebrew of Ecclus. xliii. 27:—

עוד כאלה לא נוסף  
וקץ דבר הוא הכל

"More like these we will not add ;

And the end of the matter is, He is all."

The analogy with expressions in Ecclesiastes is at once obvious, and this alone would tend towards proving the genuineness of the Hebrew. Dr. Edersheim imagined that he saw "a spurious Hellenistic addition by the younger Siracide"; a remark to which the editors of the Cambridge fragments direct attention. Now, however, we can take quite a different view of the matter. But, in relation to our present subject, the expression קץ דבר is particularly important. The Syriac is absent here; and, so far as we can tell, never existed. The Greek gives συντέλεια λόγων, a translation from which would, no doubt, have given the plural. But instead of קץ דברים we have the remarkable קץ דבר, a fact well worthy to be noted in addition to what has been said above.

I may conclude with the observation that, however great may be the value of the recent discoveries, the text of Ecclesiasticus still presents a very difficult and complicated problem.

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